

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**INNER ASIA: MAKING A LONG-TERM U.S. COMMITMENT**

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## ABSTRACT

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The strategic importance of Inner Asia to the U.S. has been highlighted as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the war in Afghanistan. The Central Asian countries—the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—have been crucial to the U.S. for access to bases, over-flight rights and rail supply lines to wage the war. However, Inner Asia represents significant interests to the U.S. beyond the current war in Afghanistan. The region possesses some of the world's largest deposits of oil, natural gas, uranium, and gold. The area is a key transit zone for drug trafficking from Asia to Europe and beyond. Inner Asia has huge stores of conventional weapons and unconventional weapons sites remaining from the former Soviet Union. Militant Islam is on the rise. The region borders the great powers of Russia and China as well as Iran and the cultural zones they represent. For these reasons Inner Asia represents significant national interests to the United States.

The 2002 National Security Strategy states the goals that the U.S. will pursue to further its national interests. Inner Asia stands out as a test of the Bush Administration's commitment to its stated National Security Strategy. This paper discusses the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy goals and their application to Inner Asia and the importance of the U.S. to make a long-term commitment. The primary focus will be on the Inner Asia countries of the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, but will also look at the influences of China and the border region of the western Chinese Xinjiang province, Iran, and Afghanistan. Current U.S. policy is analyzed for each National Security goal to include U.S. involvement with the international community and provide recommendations. The paper concludes that the United States does not have a strategic vision for Inner Asia and that it must develop a long-term multilateral regional strategy.





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## INNER ASIA: MAKING A LONG-TERM U.S. COMMITMENT

The strategic importance of Inner Asia to the U.S. has been highlighted as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the war in Afghanistan. The Central Asian countries—the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan— have been crucial to the U.S. for access to bases, over-flight rights and rail supply lines to wage the war. However, Inner Asia represents significant interests to the U.S. beyond the current war in Afghanistan. The region possesses some of the world's largest deposits of oil, natural gas, uranium, and gold. The area is a key transit zone for drug trafficking from Asia to Europe and beyond. Inner Asia has huge stores of conventional weapons and unconventional weapons sites remaining from the former Soviet Union. Militant Islam is on the rise. The region borders the great powers of Russia and China as well as Iran and the cultural zones they represent.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons Inner Asia represents significant national interests to the United States.

The 2002 National Security Strategy states the goals that the U.S. will pursue to further its national interests.<sup>2</sup> The United States will: champion aspirations for human dignity; strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism; work with others to defuse regional conflicts; prevent our enemies from threatening us, our allies and our friends with weapons of mass destruction and ignite a new era of global economic growth. All of these challenges are faced in Inner Asia. Many issues threaten regional stability and can not be resolved in the short-term. Inner Asia stands out as a test of the Bush Administration's commitment to its stated National Security Strategy. Therefore, the United States must not abandon the region after successful prosecution of the war and post-conflict operations in Afghanistan—it must develop a long-term multilateral regional strategy.

This paper discusses the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy goals and their application to Inner Asia and the importance of the U.S. to make a long-term commitment. The primary focus will be on the Inner Asia countries of the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, but will also analyze the influences of China and the border region of the western Chinese Xinjiang province, Iran, and Afghanistan. Current U.S. policy is analyzed for each goal to include U.S. involvement with the international community and provide recommendations. The paper then provides concluding comments.

## **CHAMPION ASPIRATIONS FOR HUMAN DIGNITY AND BUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR DEMOCRACY**

The United States' first imperative in the pursuit of its national security goals is to "defend liberty and justice".<sup>3</sup> America stands firmly on the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property. The U.S. is committed to encouraging change within authoritarian systems and the promotion of democratic processes while recognizing that cultural and historical differences will affect governance.

Foremost, the Bush Administration believes that development assistance in the past has not spurred economic growth and has often propped-up failed policies of assisted governments. The U.S. administration, in coordination with the UN, wants to tie assistance to meeting real reforms to policies that will encourage economic freedom, fight corruption, embrace the rule of law, invest in health care and education and enable private enterprise.<sup>4</sup> Achieving these objectives will promote democracy and raise people's lives out of poverty. Inner Asia provides significant challenges to U.S. policy in balancing immediate security needs with long-term policy direction to affect critically needed reforms. However, based on the initial successes of the war in Afghanistan and the defeat of the Taliban, the U.S. has the opportunity to focus more efforts towards shaping a long-term regional strategy that places greater emphasis on the region's failures in leadership that are affecting the governance and the economies of their nations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states of Central Asia were presented with enormous challenges. The Central Asian states were tied to Russia through electricity grids, pipelines, telephones, military bases and forces, and trade. Many of the republics were also tied to Soviet subsidies. All five of the Central Asian leaders remained from the former Soviet centralized system. Their security, language, and economy were all dependent on the Soviet system. All the leaders were faced with inflation, job creation, economic development, foreign policy and security. Foremost, they would now have to deal with public expectations on political freedom, free speech, open economy, democracy and freedom of religion.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of pushing market reforms, open societies, and Central Asian cooperation, each leader became obsessed with his political survival and his own state's problems. The leaders disallowed public participation in discussions on the political direction of their country and began to censor public television and radio. Russian demands that international prices be paid for its exports, while being willing to pay no more than Soviet era prices for Central Asian exports, caused the nations further economic decline. Economic problems were further exacerbated by

Russian demand for debt payment. Russian civil servants and management departed and the native leaders were left with little international and diplomatic experience. As a result, the standard of living of the population declined, unemployment rose, and raw materials for industry and agriculture became unavailable. Economic problems led to a significant increase in political and ethnic tensions to include those with other Central Asian states. Leader reaction was to ban opposition parties, control the media, and outlaw public discussion. These Soviet era leaders were depending on the populace to react as they had during the Soviet era. However, it has led to political activism and protests. Some of these activists have become radical. By looking to their own political survival, Central Asian leaders' repressive policies have only caused further dissent. Authoritarian and corrupt leadership has wasted their countries' resources creating poverty and degraded human rights, and has precipitated health threats to include an AIDS-HIV crisis. Additionally, it has decreased development of civil society because many non-governmental organizations are viewed as anti-government greatly affecting social welfare programs. The lack of democratic representation and religious expression has fueled inter-ethnic rivalry, religious extremism and other problems such as drug and arms trafficking.<sup>6</sup>

While the stated U.S. policy is to promote democratic processes and encourage change in autocratic regimes, the U.S. has done little to put pressure on the Central Asian leaders to carry-out overdue political and economic reforms. The U.S. focus on the Taliban and the Al Qaeda terrorist network has given the Central Asian leaders justification to further repress their populations based on the threat of Islamic fundamentalism with little criticism from the U.S.<sup>7</sup> In one form or another all the Central Asia leaders have used the new U.S. relationship to further repress their democratic processes, Islamic groups and the media. The U.S. short-term focus on basing and other support required for the war in Afghanistan while ignoring the repression and corruption is likely to increase political and religious extremism that will further destabilize the region and provide a haven for terrorists to include Al Qaeda. By overlooking this repression and continuing to deal with these regimes without encouraging reform, the U.S. could become a target of regional hatred.<sup>8</sup> As one Uzbek opposition leader states, "Twelve years have passed but the undemocratic, human rights abusing, one-party states have not changed and neither has Western support for them."<sup>9</sup> Common sentiment among the opposition is that the repressive regimes can gain prestige and money and extend their rule and still receive U.S. support in the post-terrorism world.

Over a year after the September 11 attacks there is growing instability and political crisis in every Central Asian state. In Kyrgyzstan, which previously and briefly was one of the more open of the Central Asian states, there have been mass protests. The main opposition leader is

in prison serving a long sentence. In Kazakhstan, the regime is unwilling to carry out reforms and the first family is perceived as corrupt because they are unwilling to carry-out reforms and use their relationships to amass wealth and influence. Businessmen and politicians have formed a new opposition party, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. In Turkmenistan, many of the political elite have been fired and are in exile to include the former ambassadors to China, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and a former deputy minister and senior diplomat from the Turkmenistan embassy in Washington. In March 2002, the Turkmenistan leader fired 20 top officials from the security, intelligence, and defense services for allegedly plotting a coup. The political ruling elite who had influence in these governments are now in opposition due to their leaders' lack of vision and unwillingness to undergo reforms. Foremost among these reforms is to allow Presidential elections to take place. All the Presidents of the Central Asian states are trying to prolong their own political life by extending the terms of their Presidencies. Political stagnation has reached culmination after over 10 years of the same leadership since the Soviet collapse.

The critical question is whether the U.S. will follow its own stated security policy and tie reform to economic aid. So far this does not seem to be the case. The U.S. has given Uzbekistan and Tajikistan \$160 million and \$125 million in aid respectively for 2002 without making actual provision of aid conditional on economic or political reforms. The U.S. has merely sought verbal assurances from the regimes concerning reforms. However, the U.S. did sign a bilateral agreement in March 2002 with Uzbekistan that urged "the democratic transformation of its society politically and economically." Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's President, also pledged to "promote democratic development."<sup>10</sup> The World Bank plans to lend \$1.5 billion over the next ten years and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has pledged \$300 million this year, all without a firm commitment to reform.<sup>11</sup>

Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy are areas where the U.S. must work closely with the U.N. and other international organizations to effect change. The U.S. must work closely with the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE has played a critical role in state building and democratization. The OSCE is particularly adept at monitoring and reporting on human rights and democratic governance. Unfortunately, it has become less influential with the autocratic leaders of Central Asia and is largely ignored in their recommendations because these leaders see little repercussions to ignoring its advice. The U.S. and Russia are financial contributors to the OSCE. However, OSCE presence in Central Asia needs greater funding and political leverage from the U.S., Europe, and Russia. A properly funded, resourced, and integrated

OSCE could be an effective monitoring organization especially if working closely with the U.S. and other international investors in the Central Asian economy and linking aid and investment directly to political reforms. The U.S. should also consider establishment of a special envoy and team to work closely with the Ambassadors of the Central Asian states and the OSCE to better coordinate and leverage political reform. In particular, the U.S. must encourage the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Asian Development Bank to attach political reform to investment in the region in addition to economic reform.

## **DEFEAT GLOBAL TERRORISM**

The U.S.' second goal is to strengthen alliances to defeat global terrorism and work to prevent attacks against the U.S. and its allies.<sup>12</sup> The U.S.' primary focus is on terrorists with global reach: to attack their leadership; command and control and communications; material support; and finances. The U.S. is committed to working with regional partners to coordinate efforts and isolate terrorists by denying them sponsorship, support, and sanctuary.

The stated policy direction is to work with particular states so that they have the necessary military, law enforcement, political and financial tools to defeat terrorism. The U.S. also recognizes the need to work to diminish the underlying causes that spawn terrorism, to exercise effective diplomacy to promote information and freedom and to focus efforts on areas most at risk.

Central Asia could become the next battleground in global terrorism.<sup>13</sup> The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) presents one of the biggest threats. The aim of the IMU is to topple the regime of Uzbekistan's President Karimov as part of a jihad that will reach across Central Asia. The IMU has ties to global terrorism and is funded by Osama Bin Laden as well as individual Saudis, Pakistanis, Turks, and Iranians. IMU leader Juma Namangani (reportedly killed in bombing raids) was likely among those who set-up bases with the Taliban in Afghanistan and commanded forces in the battle at Taloqan. The IMU can provide global terrorism a sanctuary in Central Asia and resources that they may not be able to obtain elsewhere such as arms, drug trafficking routes, and weapons of mass destruction. Central Asia is fertile ground for terrorism because of its porous borders, weak central governments and sympathetic population. International funding and connections of the IMU could represent significant threats to U.S. national interests.

With the Taliban defeated and dispersed, the support from outside sources has been diminished but not eliminated. It is quite probable that Central Asian Islamists will continue to

receive support from former mujahadeen groups and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. Other underground Islamist movements such as the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) or "Party of Liberation", who profess nonviolent overthrow of the Karimov regime, could join forces with the IMU. Potentially the greatest threat to regional stability and international terrorism could be the joining of other discontented marginalized political opposition groups with the IMU and HT in a violent alliance.<sup>14</sup> However, the most probable scenario is not one of international terrorism but violent conflict within the region caused by authoritarian governments and their repression of basic human rights.

## THE RISE OF MILITANT ISLAM

Independence from the Soviet Union did not immediately bring democracy, a market economy, Western consumerism and culture as in some other former Soviet Republics. Because the Soviet system had considered religion incompatible with communism, it was repressed. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Central Asian people began to reconnect to their Islamic culture and spirituality.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout Central Asia's time under the Soviet Empire it had been disconnected with the Muslim world with one critical exception and that was the Soviet war with Afghanistan. Central Asians were forced to fight in Afghanistan against their Muslim brothers and came to admire the Afghani's fight against the Soviet Communist system. With independence Central Asian began to consider whether their rulers would embrace popular Islam and democracy or continue with Communist policies of political and social repression. The answers to these questions would in great part determine regional stability.<sup>16</sup> It quickly became evident that the Central Asian leaders--products of the Soviet system--were not going to consider these options and proceeded to take the path they knew well. The ruling elites suppressed dissent, democracy, popular culture and Islamic revival.<sup>17</sup>

Political exclusion and hard line approaches have provoked radicalization among fringe Islamic and other groups. It has pushed moderates and political reformers into militant camps. In the case of Tajikistan, it caused a breakout of civil war from 1992-1997.<sup>18</sup> Although economic hardship and incursions of Islamic extremists from Uzbekistan threaten the coalition government in Tajikistan, it provides the best example in the region for a democratically elected government that recognizes Islamic parties. During the Tajikistan civil war, the IMU operated from Tajikistan and also bases inside Afghanistan. As a result of the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the end of the civil war, the IMU now operates predominantly in the Ferghana Valley, a region that is shared between the states of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Each of the three countries sharing the Ferghana valley differs in their assessment of the threat of Islamic militancy and its response to it. Uzbekistan, while initially fostering an Islamic revival in the 1990s, now believes Islamic militancy is the most serious threat to its national security. Its strategy is the most repressive, primarily using military measures. It has closed down nine hundred mosques in the Ferghana Valley alone. In addition, it has conducted house to house raids and mass arrests of men who assemble in public. The Uzbek government has also recently admitted that it has established detention camps and that detainees could be in the thousands.<sup>19</sup> Uzbekistan has also violated the sovereignty of the other two nations of the Ferghana Valley. It has bombed Tajikistan territory and mined both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan border areas.

Kyrgyzstan initially took a two-pronged approach to the problem. While building its defense capabilities it also sought direct interaction with the IMU and made attempts at negotiating a nonviolence pact. However, Kyrgyzstan is now embarking on a more restrictive path since the IMU has transitioned from merely using bases in Kyrgyz territory to launch attacks on Uzbekistan to actively engaging in operations within Kyrgyzstan to involve the regime in a wider regional conflict. As a result, Muslim clergy are being closely monitored. The Kyrgyz Ministry for National Security and the Uzbek National Security Service have been collaborating and will likely escalate repressive tactics.

Since the conclusion of the Tajikistan civil war, Islamic militancy towards the Tajikistani government has subsided. The IMU appears only to use areas in Tajikistan to launch operations against Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and not the Tajikistani government. This has put Tajikistan in direct conflict with its neighbors and at their urging has had to launch operations against the IMU despite its lack of direct hostility toward the Tajikistani government. The reason why the IMU is not currently targeting Tajikistan highlights some lessons in democratic reform and power sharing. Tajikistan is the only country that has involved Islamists in its governing coalition. The peace accord reached at the end of the Tajik civil war stipulated that 30 percent of the official posts in government be allocated to the opposition. Most of these opposition posts have gone to the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) and to a lesser extent the Communist Party. The Tajik government has no ban on political opposition as in other Central Asian states and has a two-chamber Parliament that any of the political parties may garner. While elections have not been considered totally fair, they are multi-party elections. A lack of fairness is due to the president's party, People's Democratic Party, enjoying privileged access to government resources. Setbacks in three elections with the disqualification of IRP candidates

caused some hawks in the party to move towards a jihad mentality, whereas the majority called for continuing the professionalization of IRP political activities.<sup>20</sup>

Despite a lack of transparency and perceived corruption in the political process, most Tajikistan people seem committed to building a democratic civil society despite the seemingly insurmountable economic challenges. The commitment seems predicated on having an outlet for disagreement through a voice in government, inclusion of Islamists in the political process, limiting government repression of religious observances, and a relatively free media to voice opposition. It appears that Tajikistan's success in dampening Islamic militancy has encouraged continued progress towards democratic, social and economic reform.

Unfortunately, Tajikistan offers only one example of recent success and has much room for improvement. Widespread political and social repression and economic depravation throughout Central Asia is causing the IMU to grow. The IMU is able to recruit militants from outside Central Asia to include Chechnya and the Uighurs from the Chinese Xinjiang province bordering Central Asia. The IMU and the HT aims are somewhat similar in that both want to topple the Karimov regime and further political Islam throughout Central Asia. The HT has even gone a step further than the IMU and declared jihad in Central Asia. Their aims are to reunite the Asian republics and eventually the whole Muslim world. However, the HT is significantly different than the IMU in that it professes jihad through nonviolent means. Regardless of their nonviolent means, members of the HT and IMU are often treated the same and both are filling the jails. The worst outcome would be for the HT to give up its non-violent agenda and join with the IMU as its last resort to voice political opposition and enjoy religious freedom. Even in Tajikistan, the government and the IRP feel threatened by the non-democratic objectives of the HT. A number of HT followers were captured in November 2000 and sentenced to terms in jail. Other followers were recently captured in Dushanbe.<sup>21</sup> Religious repression has served to cause greater extremist positions and devotion to Islamic ideology. Unfortunately, the historically tolerant and moderate forms of Islamic ideologies (Sufism and Jadidism) are being overtaken by extremism imported from the Taliban in Afghanistan, the madrassah culture of Pakistan and the Wahhabi doctrine of Saudi Arabia.<sup>22</sup>

Religion and ethnicity are extremely important cultural issues to the people of Central Asia. It is unlikely that a pure Western form of democracy is possible. However, a form of democracy that accommodates traditional Islam and ethnic participation will moderate religious extremism. Sixty percent of the population is under 25 and find themselves unemployed, poorly educated, and facing a declining standard of living without the opportunity to freely express themselves. This environment is prime for the rise of extremism.



As a result of this threat the countries of Central Asia, to include those not directly threatened like Kazakhstan, have increased their military spending.<sup>23</sup> The U.S. has also increased its foreign military financing and other funds to aid antiterrorism efforts. Congress has requested that the State Department report on their use of military assistance and human rights violations.<sup>24</sup>

The U.S., Russia and China are all providing military aid, advisors and training to the region. However, none of them are doing enough to improve the political, economic or social conditions that are the underlying causes for the rise of political and religious extremism. Many analysts conclude that the recent funds granted by the West in exchange for basing rights and military assistance have emboldened the Central Asian leaders to further repress their populations. Karimov is a prime example. He has reneged on his pledge to free political prisoners and has extended the term of his Presidency.

The successful conclusion of the War in Afghanistan and the transition to stability operations offers the U.S. an opportunity to pressure these regimes into greater political pluralism and democracy. The immediate urgency of basing and access has given way to a long-term relationship that must balance U.S. military and economic needs with diplomatic influence to institute democratic reforms. The only way this can be done is to tie aid directly to reforms wherever possible without threatening funding to critical anti-terrorism efforts such as destruction of WMD facilities and training of military and other officials to counter terrorism, drug trafficking, and arms proliferation.

U.S. basing in the region was predicated on supporting operations to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. These bases are still being used by Coalition forces and present a target of hostility to perceived U.S. support of Central Asian repressive regimes and could become terrorist targets. It is unlikely these bases can be disestablished, especially those in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, due to their tie to European resupply and distribution to Coalition forces. However, the U.S. should downsize forces and wherever possible, transition operations to other Coalition forces.

U.S. diplomacy must also focus on Saudi Arabia's and Pakistan's support and funding to the extremist forms of Islam. The U.S. must encourage the Saudi regime to track charitable contributions to religious organizations that make their way to religious extremist organizations and the export of Wahhabism to Central Asia—a form of Islam not traditional to the Central Asian culture. Pakistan maddrasahs routinely support and fund training of Islamic extremists from Central Asia fueling further extremism similar to the Taliban. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan must realize that this form of extremist Islam will threaten Central Asia in the same way it threatened

Afghanistan. Eventually, Osama Bin Laden is likely to also target these two countries' leadership, especially that of Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. must not allow Central Asian leaders to use the "war on terrorism" as an excuse to further undermine religious freedom. Suppression of religious activity or religious observance has politicized Islam and antagonized the populations against their regimes fomenting internal discontent and providing fuel for militancy, adding support to militants within the region and outside the region to include Afghanistan and China. Religious suppression coupled with economic hardship and political discontent pit otherwise moderate Muslims against their state. These factors are particularly acute in the Ferghana Valley and are exacerbated by interstate conflict with the region bordering three Central Asian nations. The U.S. must focus significant attention to conflict resolution in the Ferghana Valley. This area of 10 million people has the highest Muslim observance and IMU activity. It has multiple sources of tension to include: borders, overpopulation, "creeping migration", water shortages, unemployment, interethnic rivalry and contains the "criminal cluster" of drug trafficking, corruption and organized crime.<sup>25</sup> The U.S. should focus initial conflict resolution and political and economic reform efforts on the Ferghana Valley region. A multi-level group approach involving national governments, regional and local leadership, and non-governmental organizations should be used to address humanitarian support, job creation, border controls, and water and energy issues. Most importantly, the U.S. must send a strong message that Islamic religious repression is an unacceptable form of fighting terrorism. Iran provides a modern example of the affects of religious oppression of political opposition. It can provide exactly the opposite of the intended outcome.

## **DIFFUSING REGIONAL CONFLICTS**

The U.S. deems itself a concerned nation that must remain actively engaged in critical regions to diffuse conflict to avoid escalation and minimize human suffering. The U.S. will work with friends and partners to restore stability through international relationships and institutions.<sup>26</sup> Central Asia is not specifically listed as one of the major critical regions of concern for the U.S. as are Palestine, India-Pakistan, Colombia and Latin America, Indonesia, and Africa. However, it is clear that the U.S. is committed to resolving disputes that threaten regional stability. Central Asia is characterized by regional disputes over water, borders, and security issues.

Independence for the Central Asian states opened a plethora of border disputes. The administrative borders that the Soviet Union created in the 1920s did not consider natural geographic boundaries or ethnic divisions. Borders have been redrawn several times since

then creating even greater problems. The Soviets specifically avoided homogenous boundaries to avoid separatist movements. Soviet central planning caused goods, services, and transportation to move across the states freely. Now territorial claims and counter claims have negatively affected regional security concerns such as economic cooperation, ethnic relations and efforts to combat drug trafficking and religious extremism.<sup>27</sup> Long standing industrial and transportation links were disrupted, ethnic populations who had previously enjoyed unfettered access now must meet visa requirements and encounter access problems. Much of the population view restrictions with hostility, especially as it has affected their traditional patterns of commerce and society. Tensions over borders carry over to other areas such as trade and have become important domestic political issues. Concessions and negotiations often present political challenges for those countries that permit political parties.

Territorial disputes are an extremely emotional issue that ties directly to each country's national interests. The Ferghana Valley is one of the more complicated border issues. It is shared between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who all have historical claims to each other's territories and economic interests such as transport routes, rivers, reservoirs and industries. Discussions are stalled over many points and are not likely to be resolved any time soon.<sup>28</sup> Where demarcations have been agreed, border crossings are difficult, slowing trade and causing tension. Demands for visas that are expensive for much of the poor local populations have made movement for them difficult. Customs officers and border forces are poorly trained and are corrupt, using bribes as a means to supplement their incomes. Cross border difficulties are affecting interactions of people with a common culture causing distrust of their governments. Border crossings are frequent places for reports of deaths by mines and shootings for those who have strayed into foreign territories. Most of the limitations on cross-border movement have been imposed for security purposes, yet they have not prevented movement of narcotics traffickers or terrorists.

Border disputes are one more destabilizing factor in a region already plagued with severe economic and political problems. Resolving these border issues will require a long-term commitment and engagement strategy from the U.S. and the international community. Border issues are complex, entrenched and politically volatile; only a semi-permanent mediator or team can help the region in resolving these disputes. Appointment of an U.S. or UN special envoy is a possible solution. The special envoy must work immediately to get states to cease mining of frontiers and imposing unilateral border demarcations while working to simplify visa and border crossing procedures. In the longer term they must seek border agreements and ratification through each country's legal system and reach agreements on tariffs and possibly eventually

eliminate them to spur free trade and economic growth. The OSCE may be a possible solution for border guard training and monitoring given its relative success in Kosovo and Georgia/Albania.<sup>29</sup> The European Union, Russia, the U.S. and other international donors could contribute additional funding for OSCE efforts. Ultimately, successful regional security cooperation and an increase in regional stability may create a Central Asia without internal borders, focusing efforts only on its outer borders with Afghanistan, China and Iran. Elimination of border issues is fundamental to creating wider cooperation on other economic, social and security issues.

Some have suggested that a strong Uzbekistan could be a stabilizer for Central Asia and form the third leg of a tripod alongside Russia and the Ukraine.<sup>30</sup> Uzbekistan has long been considered the dominant power in the Central Asia. It is the largest, richest and most populous state and has attempted to establish itself as the regional hegemon.<sup>31</sup> Russia has been content to look the other way provided that Uzbekistan does not threaten the Russian-dominated oil fields in Kazakhstan. Karimov wants to expand his borders and seize the entire Ferghana Valley from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to be able to strike out against Islamic militants who want to create their own state there and have been launching attacks against Uzbekistan. He also wants to control various infrastructure assets such as pipelines, highways and power grids. While security is Karimov's main concern, such actions would also reduce Uzbekistan's dependence on other countries in the region, especially water resources. Uzbekistan could use the U.S. presence there in support of the war in Afghanistan to expand its influence in the region. The U.S. has done too little to discourage Uzbekistan from launching out in other Central Asian countries in its war against terrorists. The Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan governments and militaries are too weak to oppose Uzbekistan's intrusions on their sovereignty.

The U.S. should not support Uzbekistan's desires to be a regional hegemon. Karimov is not capable of providing the regional leadership that would stabilize the region and absent Karimov there is a political vacuum in Uzbekistan due to the lack of any other effective political leaders. Russia still remains a more stable influence in the region than Uzbekistan and this would be more in the U.S. interest than Karimov's leadership. Karimov has consistently limited foreign investment, limited private and public companies and generally has made Uzbekistan a miserable place in which to live.<sup>32</sup> Uzbekistan's control over infrastructure in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan towns has affected their ability to function and negatively affected their governance.

Uzbekistan is likely to continue to receive economic and foreign investment that will make Uzbekistan stronger. The U.S. must tie this assistance to moderating its behavior towards its neighbors while at the same time not impeding the war on terrorism. The U.S. must have a

balanced approach and not favor any particular country over another and support Central Asian regional cooperation. To its credit, the U.S. military and Department of State used this strategy to support the war in Afghanistan by opening bases and encouraging Coalition partners in the other Central Asia nations of Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek-Manas), Tajikistan (Kulyab, Dushanbe) and temporarily in Turkmenistan (Ashbagat) where missions permitted.

## **PREVENTING OUR ENEMIES FROM THREATENING US WITH WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION**

New challenges confront the U.S. since the end of the Cold War. The National Security Strategy of the U.S. recognizes the deadly challenges that have emerged with the rise of rogue states and terrorists. President Bush believes the greatest danger to freedom lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology.<sup>33</sup> Key to the Bush Administration's comprehensive strategy to combat WMD is to strengthen nonproliferation efforts to prevent rogue states and terrorists from acquiring the materials, technologies, and expertise necessary for constructing weapons of mass destruction. Methods include arms control, multilateral export controls and threat reduction assistance. The U.S. seeks to encourage coalitions to support increased political and financial support for nonproliferation and threat reduction programs.

The Central Asian states are the location for many of the former Soviet Union's nuclear, biological and chemical programs. The Aral Sea island of Vozrozhdeniye is the location of much of the Soviet Union's biological weapons experimentation program where Soviet scientists conducted germ warfare experiments for over 40 years.<sup>34</sup> The U.S. sent a team to the island in Uzbekistan in October 2001 to dismantle the biological weapons facility on the island, remove buried anthrax spores and decontaminate the site. The U.S. budget allotted for the operation is only \$6 million. Based on the events of 9/11 and the anthrax outbreak in the U.S., it is likely the U.S. is moving in quickly to avoid having the site fall into terrorist hands or someone who would potentially sell it to terrorists.

The depletion of the waters of the Aral Sea due to poor Soviet water management have left the island accessible via land—greatly easing the challenge of illicit access. This site is one of the largest biological development sites in the world and has not been staffed in over a decade. When the Soviets vacated the premises they merely buried the stocks and left. The soil is contaminated with anthrax, tularaemia, bubonic plague, brucellosis, Q fever, and encephalitis. It is unlikely that \$6 million is enough to clean up the site. Decontaminating biological and chemical sites is complex, expensive and time-consuming. The United Kingdom's Gruinard Island has been the only site that has ever been declared clean and the certification process took multiple attempts over several decades. Compare this to the

estimated \$12 billion to clean up the U.S. chemical weapons site at Johnson Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. After the Soviet collapse, the U.S. spent over \$400 million over several years in Kazakhstan alone to dismantle 104 Soviet SS-19 ballistic missiles with over 100 nuclear warheads along with the testing sites at Baikonur and Semipalatinsk.<sup>35</sup>

The U.S. must stay committed for the long haul if it wants to truly clean up this site and eliminate the potential of biological agents falling into the wrong hands. Until it eliminates the hazard, the U.S. must establish a security and monitoring system to prevent the agents from being removed. The Central Intelligence Agency suspects that Osama Bin Laden is attempting to get the IMU to acquire weapons of mass destruction, especially biological weapons, from Central Asia.<sup>36</sup> This significantly elevates the importance of the elimination of these facilities to U.S. national interests.

The question is whether the U.S. is committing enough resources to the area to eliminate any potential for WMD proliferation. The U.S. has expended \$7 billion dollars already to secure weapons materials and know how in the countries of the former Soviet Union and already committed another \$10 billion in the next decade. The U.S. received commitment from other G-8 countries of another \$10 billion.<sup>37</sup> It can be argued that if the U.S. is willing to spend well over a hundred billion to defeat Saddam Hussein in Iraq for potentially having WMD, that the U.S. should spend whatever is necessary in Central Asia to ensure that WMD does not fall into anti-U.S. hands. With the warming of relations with Russia, the U.S. should work closely with its leaders to identify and eliminate all potential sites.

To combat WMD trafficking the U.S. should also increase funding to the Export Control and Border security program, a joint program by the Department of State and Customs Service to provide nonproliferation training and equipment to the former Soviet states.<sup>38</sup> Part of this program is called the "Shadow Wolves" program and provides training in tracking smugglers of WMD. Currently, the program has been provided only to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Clearly there are many border challenges existing within the remainder of Central Asia. The Islamic extremist area of the Ferghana valley that falls within the three countries of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the border between Turkmenistan and Iran present challenges for preventing proliferation of WMD.

## **GLOBAL ECONOMIC GROWTH**

A strong world economy enhances U.S. national security by advancing prosperity and freedom in the rest of the world. Economic growth supported by free trade and free markets creates new jobs and higher incomes and allows people to lift their lives out of poverty. It spurs

economic and legal reform and the fight against corruption.<sup>39</sup> The U.S. is committed to promoting economic growth and economic freedom in the world, convinced that history demonstrates that market economies, not command control economies with the heavy hand of government, are the best way to promote prosperity and reduce poverty. Objectives towards achieving this goal are removing structural barriers, improving stability in emerging markets, and providing access to capital. The U.S. believes that promoting the connection between trade and development will strengthen property rights, competition, rule of law, investment, the spread of knowledge, open societies, efficient allocation of resources and regional integration—all things that will lead to growth and confidence of the people in their nation. In so doing the U.S. believes that the environment is an important concern that must be considered in economic growth and an important consideration in providing a better life along with prosperity. Foremost among its stated objectives, the U.S. specifically addresses the need to enhance energy security for the U.S. and the global economy by expanding the producers and sources of energy.

#### GLOBAL ENERGY

While the Bush administration would like to stabilize or reduce U.S. dependence on oil imports, this is an almost impossible task given increasing U.S. demand and declining U.S. production. The U.S. dependence on imports is at 54 percent, up from 42 percent in 1990.<sup>40</sup> More importantly, the U.S. would like to reduce its oil dependence on the politically volatile Middle East and push diversification for other nations as well. The U.S. imports about 25 percent from the Middle East. More than 90 percent of the oil needs of Asia-Pacific nations comes from the Middle East. Europe receives 25 percent of its oil from the Middle East.

The Caspian Sea is thought to have the third largest petroleum resources in the world (behind Saudi Arabia and Russia). Reserves in Central Asia are much larger than previously assumed.<sup>41</sup> Four of the five countries bordering on the region are former Soviet republics, two from Central Asia-- Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The fifth is Iran representing about 11 percent of the shoreline. However the Iranian sector has few oil or gas resources and depends on revenue sharing agreements. The nations have yet to agree on the division of oil resources but with Russian influence, the rest of the countries have edged Iran out.<sup>42</sup> Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan together account for about 92 percent of the region's total oil reserves. Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan share 95 percent of Central Asia's natural gas reserves.<sup>43</sup> The combined reserves of Russia and the Caspian region would match that of the Middle East and provide a competitive alternative to Middle East crude oil.

Prior to September 11, the U.S. pursued two often conflicting goals: encouraging Russia to better protect U.S. corporate interests and assisting the Caspian countries in developing and exporting their own energy resources by avoiding pipeline routes through Russia (an “anti-monopoly” vice “anti-Russian” policy). Beginning with the Clinton administration, the U.S.-backed position (supported also by the UK, France, Greece, Turkey) was to ensure that energy routes transited through friendly nations, fearing that the Russians or someone else, such as Iran, could manipulate what could become a vital crude resource for Western markets.<sup>44</sup> This policy ensured that Azerbaijani energy resources would be routed through a pipeline from Georgia to Turkey. Kazakhstan energy resources were expected to begin flowing through the pipeline in 2015. The U.S. and Japanese governments are key players because they are providing loan guarantees to suppliers. The Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Co. (BTC) is financing 70 percent of the project and providing loan guarantees for Azerbaijan to fund the remainder of the pipeline. The changing strategic context and the warming of relations with Russia coupled with reform in Russia's oil companies may require a modification to this strategy in favor of a balanced approach. This strategy would seek Central Asian independence through westward pipeline projects and also favor more expedient northwest routes through Russia to expedite economic development.

Russian firms are now poised on the world market. Russia's oil leaders have reformed and are now backed by improved rule of law and they must meet the performance criteria dictated by financial markets.<sup>45</sup> The firms' shares are now publicly traded and they are interested in reinvesting capital to protect the company's wealth. Russia is now in position to be a significant player in the world oil market. Not insignificantly, Russia's petroleum revival has coincided with the terrorist attacks of September 11, providing Russia an opportunity to displace OPEC as the West's energy supplier. For Russia, the new geopolitics of energy can help them both politically and economically. Economically, they can be integrated in the industrialized West. Politically, energy resources can greatly assist Russia's goal of becoming a partner of the U.S.<sup>46</sup>

While Russia is improving the rule of law, it is not providing direct investment opportunities for foreign investment in the oil industry and wants to keep investment in Central Asian countries in the hands of Russian companies. Yet these same Russian countries want to expand abroad so they are becoming much more open to joint ventures with international Western companies when they require technology. The new environment of cooperation post-September 11 and Russian corporate interests have moved Russia to support independent



export pipeline interests in the Caspian region to expedite development. Significant room is available for U.S. influence in oil investment in the region.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to future transit west, Kazakhstan could move crude oil and natural gas through Russia. The northwest pipeline movement would combine Kazakhstan's growing energy sector with the Russian transport infrastructure. Kazakh production would be able to ramp-up much quicker than expected affecting distribution of supplies to Europe. Kazakh producers could then ship oil by three separate routes to the Black Sea.

Unfortunately, these west and north-northwest routes do little to provide diversification to the Asia-Pacific region that would be served if pipelines were built through China or Iran.<sup>48</sup> Obviously a pipeline through Iran would negate the diversification purpose of Middle Eastern oil supplies and this would not be in the U.S. national interest. The Russia deal with Kazakhstan and the international investment in the BTC pipeline is focused westward making an eastern pipeline solely dependent upon funding from China. Turkmenistan has better relations with Iran and if Turkmenistan were frozen out of distribution through Russian infrastructure via Kazakhstan this could cause them to look southward. Based on Iran's political isolation from the West, the U.S. should seek to influence Russia and Kazakhstan to support distribution of Turkmenistan's energy resources through their distribution network.

The U.S. must decide whether it is going to continue with the strategy of the past: continuing to push for export routes and arrangements that free the Central Asian states from Russian, Iranian or Chinese control, or pursuing the most economically viable options given the changing strategic context. Clearly, it is in the U.S. national interest to influence Central Asian countries and U.S. investors to avoid distribution routes that extend through Iran into the Gulf based on the U.S. determination that Iran is among the nations which comprise an "axis of evil" that lend their support to international terrorism. However, the improved relationship with Russia and the U.S security objective to change the environment of the "great power politics" of the past, provide an opportunity to influence the most efficient and market-oriented approach to export routes and to assist in the arrangement of financing for these capital intensive projects. It may also serve U.S. interests to allow Russian oil company investment on U.S.-backed projects such as the BTC pipeline. A market-oriented approach where global investors are free to pick winners and demand corporate reform and increased production based on good economics is likely to be the best position in the long term to align company, shareholder and national interests.<sup>49</sup> The U.S. should not attempt to influence or dissuade Chinese investment in an oil pipeline to the east to service Asia-Pacific interests. For the near term it appears unlikely that

this option will be feasible since financing is unavailable due to other Central Asian commitments.

The U.S. should also encourage property rights in the region. This legislation has already been implemented in Kazakhstan. This stops the practice of moving profits out of publicly traded companies that destroys minority shareholder value (typically the developing country investors) and eliminates the tax base for emerging economies. The U.S. can also help avoid these practices by developing and instituting training programs for Central Asian tax officials and legal systems to appropriately implement effective legislation. The U.S. must continue to build closer relationships with Central Asian countries and leverage U.S. oil company investment and other aid in the region to achieve economic, social, and political reforms.

#### WATER CONFLICT AND ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

One of the major challenges facing the region is environmental devastation. The Aral Sea was once the fourth largest inland sea in the world. Now the Aral Sea has shrunk to less than a third of its size due to years of poor water management.<sup>50</sup> Numerous port towns are now nothing but desert. 35 million people live in the region and a tenth of them live in a disaster zone. Disease and poverty are on the rise. Soviet land use policy, corruption, and drought have been the primary causes. The Soviets tapped into the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers to irrigate cotton fields in the 1960s causing rivers downstream to drop. The diversion of water upstream has been so severe that a huge lake has been created at the border of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. It frequently floods pastures while those towns downstream get drier and drier. The salt flats blow in from the north and drift southward. The growing desert causes poverty and leads to illness. Tuberculosis to include TB of the bones and other infectious diseases of the nineteenth century are on the rise. Stomach and intestinal cancer rates, thyroid problems, anemia and infertility affect large portions of the population. The infant mortality rate—one in ten—is one of the highest in the world.

The ability of the Central Asian states to arrive at a solution after years of resentment will be difficult. Competition for water is increasing at an alarming rate, adding tension to an already unstable region.<sup>51</sup> Agriculture is the mainstay of the region and water use has gone out of control since the Central Asian states have become independent and current rates of usage are unsustainable. Unless a solution is found, the resentment could lead to greater conflict. Turkmenistan's solution to the problem is building a 2000 square meter lake while it continues to cause more desert downstream. This is merely another indicator of the region's nations failure to work together. An annual cycle of disputes has developed between the three downstream

countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and the two upstream countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). The downstream countries are concerned about water for agriculture while the upstream countries are trying to gain more control over the resources for electricity and farming.

Poor water management resulted from the Soviet's top down approach. In 1992, the Interstate Water Commission (ICWC) was set-up to work issues based on the changing economic and political realities. It was established to be an inter-governmental body on water management but has done little but focus on the division of water. There is no representation from non-governmental organizations or farmers and therefore the ICWC has little transparency to the public. Uzbek officials also dominate the commission so other countries are suspicious of the commission's intentions. However, none of the other countries have done much to benefit the region as a whole either.

Several Western donors have started to develop programs such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in coordination with the International Fund to Save the Aral Sea (IFAS). The UN has also backed a Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) to work on water management. However, none of these initiatives have been able to overcome the political obstacles, especially the unwillingness of these nations to cooperate.<sup>52</sup>

After independence the five countries agreed to maintain the Soviet era quota system. Several factors have now made this unworkable, including the civil war in Tajikistan and the decay of Kyrgyzstan's economy that caused their water monitoring facilities to fall into disrepair. All of the countries have accused each other of exceeding quotas. Serious disputes have arisen over barter agreements and payments. The upstream countries trade water to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for energy resources such as gas, coal or power. Unreliable energy deliveries have caused Kyrgyzstan to unleash more water through its hydropower dam in the winter causing flooding downstream. The end result has been for each country to view its own needs at the expense of others and to pursue projects without consulting any of the other states. Tensions over water and energy have created such a hostile political climate that some countries have stated that they are willing to defend their interests by force if necessary.

A long-term multifaceted regional approach is required to resolve the entrenched issues related to the conflict over water and its environmental consequences. Because of the water's relationship to energy and agriculture a holistic approach has to be sought when seeking solutions to water management. Aid for technical solutions has limited impact without the requisite leverage to affect political decision-making. Resolving the water problems will require a comprehensive program of political, economic and social reform. Overcoming the political

barriers may be the greatest contribution the U.S. could perform to influence this issue. The U.S. should expand aid to technical solutions while conditioning this aid on political and economic reforms.

First would be to reform the regional organizations in existence such as the ICWC. Reform should cover expansion of membership to include NGO and water users throughout the region. The charter of the organization should be expanded to include energy and agricultural issues that affect water management. It needs to be equitable and represent each Central Asian state and have the power to enforce quotas and make decisions that must be enforced or appropriate sanctions will be taken. Technical and diplomatic solutions must also be devised to enhance the monitoring capacity of the ICWC.<sup>53</sup> The U.S. and other international organizations must get members to come to an agreement, supported by their states, on payments for infrastructure maintenance and water production improvements. The Commission should also be encouraged to draft national water codes and revise existing quotas to reflect current water shortages. Ultimately, the U.S. and other international donors must encourage a move towards market pricing for water and energy to include establishment of a water-energy consortium to expand regional cooperation and speed economic reform. Finally, the U.S. must take immediate diplomatic efforts to stop infrastructure projects that will only further deepen political hostilities and cause further environmental damage and long-term economic and social affects on their people. Encouraging the formation of an independent organization to make decisions on infrastructure improvements and assess projects by which each state would abide may be one of the most critical and immediate steps.

### **COOPERATIVE ACTION WITH OTHER CENTERS OF GLOBAL POWER**

America wants to implements its strategies by organizing coalitions to promote a balance of power that favors freedom. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), European Union, NATO-Russia Council, World Trade Organization (WTO) and other regional alliances and world organizations play an important role in maintaining a favorable balance of power.<sup>54</sup> In maintaining a favorable balance of power, the U.S. is particularly wary of returning to the patterns of great power politics of the past concerning its relations with China and Russia.

Central Asia is an area that separates great powers—China and Russia--and at the intersection of major geopolitical centers—Eurasian, Islamic, Chinese and Indian. The region is important because of its resources and its geo-strategic position at the center of the Eurasian continent on the intersection of critical trading routes. The economic and political development of the region is incomplete which could result in potential clashes of global powers for

domination in the region. Central Asia has no access to the sea and its communications to world markets are dependent upon energy from and transport routes through adjacent countries.

Russia remains and is likely to remain the most influential power in the region. Leadership in the region follows the historic Soviet “pattern of thinking”.<sup>55</sup> This thinking contributes to the fact that Russia believes that the post-Soviet states should be oriented towards Moscow. More importantly, Russia remains the major trading partner of the Central Asian states. Russia’s goal is to retain the independent states in their sphere of influence and limit the penetration of other global powers in the region to control the development and integration processes. A key Russian interest is to protect ethnic Russians and Russian speaking peoples and counteract the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism that is regarded as a threat. This threat was particularly acute prior to the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and the cessation of the recent civil war in Tajikistan. Russia views the “rebirth of Islam”, politicization of the traditionally Islamic population, as a threat which can undermine support to the current authorities and change their foreign policy orientations, particularly toward the Middle East.<sup>56</sup>

The initial Russian strategy after the collapse of the Soviet Union was to form a collective security treaty with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries for a so-called common defense—predominantly a military strategy. Russia viewed this treaty as a strategy of an “advanced lines” protection of Russian national interests. This strategy failed militarily upon the withdrawal of Uzbekistan, Georgia and Azerbaijan from the collective security treaty in 1999. Subsequently, Russia has taken a “softer approach” through economic and diplomatic influence and military cooperation mainly focused at reducing threats of internal conflict and external intervention.<sup>57</sup> These efforts can be seen as both a counterbalance to NATO enlargement and the expansion of the European Union and a political extension of Russia’s previous “advanced line” protection strategy, in particular to counter the terrorism threat along the borders with Afghanistan.

China is a key trading partner for the Central Asia states and Central Asian security is integral to Chinese security. China’s stated foreign policy objectives for the region are peaceful coexistence and the development of relations with its Central Asian neighbors. While attempting to establish bilateral relationships with countries of Central Asia, they have tried to avoid rivalry with the U.S. or Russia in the region.<sup>58</sup> Political stability of the region included tensions along the borders caused by territorial claims and counterclaims and the increasing numbers of Chinese troops stationed along the borders. As a result, an agreement was signed in 1997 with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia on the Mutual Reduction of their

Armed Forces in the Border Area that fixed a limit for troops and armament in the “100-kilometer Border Zone”, demarcation of borders, and joint military patrols. This was the first time that a multilateral security arrangement was agreed upon in the region. The permanent result was the creation of the “Shanghai Five” committed to annual meetings ultimately evolving into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (or the SCO) as a geo-strategic alliance to develop joint programs for security, economic, political and other areas and the introduction of Uzbekistan into the forum in 2001.<sup>59</sup> In 1999 the forum pledged to create a “multi-polar world” —meaning opposition to U.S. hegemony in the region and keeping the U.S from emerging as a unilateral global power. Russian President Yeltsin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin also met separately and committed to broadening their strategic partnership.

In pursuit of these goals the Chinese have paid particular attention to the political stability of the region and the influence of Muslim fundamentalism on China.<sup>60</sup> China is now concerned about the IMU and its attempt to recruit Islamic militants and separatists from China’s only Muslim province, Xinjiang province bordering Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Central Asian countries have worked with Chinese security forces to shut down Uighur separatists from conducting political activities on their soil and preventing the export of arms, propaganda or funds for Uighur separatists in China.<sup>61</sup> Islamic extremism has provided China the impetus to engage in military and security cooperation with the nations of Central Asia and Russia. China, Russia and Central Asia (or the SCO) have pledged to work together on a broad range of common security interests including international terrorism, illegal immigration, separatism and religious extremism. The Chinese have committed funds to Central Asia for technical and military assistance for counter-terrorism mostly in the form of border guard training and equipment.

Central Asia clearly represents an ideal region to implement the Bush national security strategy to work with other centers of global power and to maintain a favorable balance of power. September 11, 2001 changed great power relationships by leading to great power cooperation to eliminate the Taliban and Al Qaeda. It has also provided the great powers a unifying cause to fight international terrorism and Islamic extremism, particularly the defeat of the IMU and its influence in the region. These mutual interests can form the foundation of further military, political and economic cooperation. Strategic competition can be taken over by a strategic partnership to expand assistance to the Central Asian states.

Policy direction towards Central Asia should be based on a strategic vision of multi-lateral cooperation with Russia and China to reduce suspicions of U.S. intentions of regional domination. Therefore, the U.S. should continue military-to-military training and other security

cooperation efforts without seeking a permanent military presence and reduce the military footprint to the minimal necessary to continue support to stability operations in Afghanistan. Reduction of the U.S. presence will avoid threatening Russian and Chinese mutual cooperation and more importantly, Central Asian autonomy. U.S. interests and Central Asian nationalism is best served by retaining Central Asian independence and avoiding dominance from the three great powers. Central Asians are opposed to U.S. dominance in the region to prevent Russian domination and are concerned about the regional balance of power and great power politics that would have a negative impact upon them. Central Asians place Russia at the top of countries they trust, because of Soviet era policies, while the U.S. places third.<sup>62</sup> Despite common interests, Russia will always remain concerned over any Chinese military presence on its advance line borders. Likewise, Central Asian countries remain concerned that the rapid rate of economic growth in China may cause it to look to dominate Central Asia. Therefore, Central Asian nations, particularly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, look to Russia and the West to counterbalance Chinese influence.

The U.S. should seek common ground for initial Russian and Chinese cooperation such as counter-terrorism training, border guard training, peacekeeping training and intelligence sharing on Islamic extremists. Further economic and political cooperation should be developed through established organizations such as the SCO, recognizing that the U.S. is currently not a member and may not be officially invited as a member. Other multi-lateral cooperation could include the U.S., Russia, and the OSCE focusing on human rights, democratic reforms, and intra-state conflict resolution. However, the U.S. must proceed with caution in U.S.-Russia-China relations to ensure that the Central Asian people do not perceive cooperation as an anti-Islam crusade. U.S. diplomacy must still focus on adherence to basic human rights to include freedom of religion. Finally, competition for natural resources could be transitioned to a cooperative effort among the great powers to maximize investment, exploration and benefit to the Central Asian population. Cooperation among the great powers would prevent corrupt governments from being able to exploit their differences and provide leverage for reform.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The U.S. has no strategic vision for Inner Asia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, policy makers developed a Russia first strategy where Central Asia interests were not considered separate from Russia even though the states of the region were now independent. It then shifted to combating terrorism and providing the Central Asian states military capabilities while exploiting their natural resources. Inner Asian regional stability is dependent on a long-

term multilateral strategy that works with the great powers of China and Russia as well as international and regional organizations to provide assistance and cause economic and political reforms. Only through this process will the Bush Administration be able to meet its stated National Security Strategy goals.

Combating terrorism is critically important to regional stability, however the underlying causes must be dealt with to eliminate the fertile ground that is growing terrorism. The growth of Islamic extremism is a direct result of the suppression of democratic political parties, tight state control over local media, multiple corruption scandals in the political leadership, and poverty. The Bush Administration must transition from its focus on short-term military security issues to the longer-term issues of economic and democratic reform, human rights, and economic and environmental assistance.<sup>63</sup> A long-term commitment is essential to the Administration in meeting its National Security Strategy goals.

Policy makers must understand that the greatest threat to regional stability is not from external sources but is primarily internal. The complex processes of national and state consolidation and legitimization of power, developing national legislation, getting rid of the effects of centralized government, transforming the socioeconomic systems, and settling inter-state conflicts such as borders and water are the most essential factors in creating regional stability. Regional rivalries, jealousies and competition are preventing the Central Asian states from agreeing on security issues and creating a Greater Central Asian market. It is unlikely that Central Asia will progress without being encouraged to resolve internal Central Asia conflicts and establish an economic common market and joint forums with joint positions being shared by each state. The Administration must work with international organizations, such as the OSCE, to resolve regional conflicts so that a Greater Central Asia can become a reality. The Administration should consider a Special Envoy to the region to initially focus on resolving two key disputes—water and borders--and then transition to greater regional cooperation. An envoy may be particularly important as the military presence downsizes due to U.S. success in the war in Afghanistan and the focus of efforts shift to political, social and economic reforms. Diffusing regional conflicts is critical for free trade and movement, building infrastructure and economic development.

Economic assistance holds the greatest potential for expansion and greatly influences acceptance of diplomatic and political efforts. Economic assistance focused directly to the poor to overcome the economic disparity among the rich ruling elite and the overwhelming number of poor people. The U.S. should work with the international community to provide debt relief. The Bush Administration must not continue down the current path of providing military and economic



aid without tying it directly to stated political and social reform measures that the Central Asian states must undertake. The U.S. must push for reforms while seeking investment in the region's strategic assets. The U.S. should also encourage U.S. oil companies who invest in the region to look at socially responsible ways to contribute to the lives of people in the region.

Militarily the U.S. has made the greatest contribution to the beginning of a long-term strategy in Inner Asia—resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. Dire poverty, corruption, repressive policies and the rise of Islamic extremism in the Central Asian states coupled with a nearby government of religious zealots--the Taliban--in Afghanistan, could have led to a wider regional conflict. The future of U.S and Inner Asia relations will be shaped by what happens in Afghanistan. So far the war has been relatively successful, it has defeated the Taliban and created the conditions for nation-building efforts. Islamic extremists and tribal rivalry still exist as well as a significant portion of the Al Qaeda. If the situation deteriorates, it is likely that the U.S. will allow short-term military interests to prevail over other national security interests. A stable Afghanistan will allow the U.S. to pursue a long-term strategy in Inner Asia.

WORD COUNT = 10,840



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable," Foreign Affairs. January/February 1996, 1.
- <sup>2</sup> George W. Bush, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 20, 2002), 1- 2.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, 3.
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- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 501-502.
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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 528-529.

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